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### Training and News for the Seattle Auxiliary Communication Service

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## Working W7ACS

### A First-Hand Account of the October 4th Communications Drill

By Randy Schaffer N7OYN

The October 4<sup>th</sup> 2003 communications drill called upon many amateur volunteers for service to the Seattle community. With 27 designated community centers, including NOAA and the EOC, the drill required the efforts of many ACS members on the day of the event and many hours of planning prior to the exercise. This story is about my service at the Seattle Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for the drill. This very positive experience was due to the many hours spent by Auxil-

iary Communications Service (ACS) leadership coordinating this exercise.

The Seattle EOC is a secure facility that the city will fully staff in the event of an emergency. Many operations can be

coordinated through the EOC. The ACS has been allocated a small space central to the many other operations of the facility. Our mission is to make sure vital messages can be transmitted to Seattle city emergency re-

sponders in the event of normal communication failure. To fulfill this mission, many capabilities for communication are possible. Police and Fire radios, 6 meter, 2 meter, 70 centimeter, and high frequency (HF) radios are permanent fixtures of the ACS space. The radios are set up well for this sort of operation. Each operator has two multi-band radios at their station



*Photo by Mark Sheppard N7LYE*

## QRV?

QRV? = "Are you prepared?"

*QRV? is the Newsletter of the Seattle  
Auxiliary Communication Service*

City of Seattle  
Emergency Management

**ACS Net & Disaster Coordination**  
Weekly Net, Mondays at 7:00 p.m.  
146.96 MHz

**ACS Primary Message Channels**  
441.80 MHz (tone 141.3 Hz)  
443.00 MHz (tone 141.3 Hz)  
443.65 MHz (tone 141.3 Hz)

**ACS 6 Meter Frequency**  
53.250 MHz (tone 100 Hz)

**ACS Website**  
[www.cityofseattle.org/eoc/acs](http://www.cityofseattle.org/eoc/acs)

**State & County Nets**  
Washington State Emergency  
Mondays at 5:30 p.m.  
Saturdays at 9:00 a.m.  
3.985 MHz

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King County ARES  
Sundays at 8:00 p.m.  
146.82 MHz (tone 103.5)

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## From the Editor

### The Rearview Mirror

Maybe you've heard that old joke too. It goes "Don't look back. They may be gaining on you!" I suppose that may be okay for some, but if we intend to improve our communications skills and operating systems it's not good advice for us.

For a long time, actually since the sixties, I've maintained an interest in the uses of simulations in training. Thanks to a graduate student, I even had an opportunity to fly real airliner simulator. I could take off and fly okay, but landing was another story!

As I continued to study simulations I soon came to realize that of the most important learning events occurs *after* the simulation exercise. It's called the debriefing session and its purpose is to give participants an opportunity to thoughtfully reflect and discuss at length everything that happened during the simulation.

Our communications drills may be considered a simulation of sorts. We learn a lot from going through those drills. They are unique opportunities to uncover what works and what doesn't. Our November *debriefing* meeting resulted in a number of helpful suggestions for improving our message and traffic handling, both at neighborhood community centers and at the EOC.

So, getting back to rear-

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## From the EOC

By Jim Mullen, Director  
Seattle Emergency  
Management

The more I learn about the state of emergency management/homeland security programs around the country, the more I hear that Emergency Management professionals are all concerned about the same things.

The current buzz word is interoperability, which is used so often that it almost loses its meaning. We also hear about accountability, about public education. We hear from many experts the sobering expectation that sooner, if not later, another attack against our country and within our borders is going to occur.

I don't have, or even need, the clearance to evaluate these predictions. The reason is that the 9/11 attacks were preceded by the 1993 World Trade Center attack. Law enforcement prevented others, as seen in some of the court cases that followed. So we know that there are people willing and able to attack us where we live. Our challenge is to be prepared without being depressed, and to be concerned without being paranoid. This is no small challenge.

Usually, when I discuss disaster readiness these days, I put in a plug for the natural disaster scenario - let's not forget about our old standby, the ever-likely earthquake. I do this, and I am joined in doing so by many of my colleagues in the North West, be-

cause a major earthquake has the potential to wreak as much physical and economic harm as would most forms of terror. But, terrorism deserves special attention because it is a deliberate, willful attempt to hurt a society, and so a word like prevention enters into our emergency management language where it really is not applied to our natural disasters.

In part because the nation is now clearly in uncharted waters in terms of disasters, that is, in adding to the menu of national disasters an awareness of a coordinated and deadly threat that might strike at any location, there have been some fits and starts in the national, state and local responses to this problem.

***Here are some of the questions our current situation raise:***

- 1) Can we approach terrorism within the same readiness structure as we have with other hazards?
- 2) Can we achieve the proper balance between emphasizing our preparations for terrorism and our preparations for other disasters?

***My answers:***

1) it is important that we not abandon existing structures but we can expand our range and scope to include the expertise and capabilities of those primarily drawn to emergency management by the new emphasis on homeland security. Our overall level of readiness is enhanced: the temporary lure of the millions in federal dollars some cities, like Seattle, are receiving as part of the federal preparedness strategy has upgraded the importance of every function that we do, whether it explicitly involves ter-

rorism or not;

2) Inevitably, we will swing back and forth between emphasis on one type of response or another. The key is balance, and balance is achieved by the integrated system that is in use in the City, and managed in the Emergency Operations Center. We do the same things whether the incident is an earthquake, a windstorm, or an attack by our country's enemies. We gather information, analyze data, consult with experts (that changes with the event) and communicate horizontally, vertically and laterally within our City and governmental response systems, and we inform and where necessary instruct the public. So, in my view, balance is achievable through our systematized procedures.

This year we have made great strides in achieving the balance that we need. The TOPOFF exercise is one such example. The emergence of the Emergency Preparedness Bureau arrived just in time to provide vital support to the post TOPOFF Urban Security initiatives, allowing Emergency Management's ongoing programs (SDART, Project Impact/Disaster Resistant Businesses) the opportunity to continue to flourish without its resources being diverted to the most recent federally mandated activities. As a result, we have been moving forward on many fronts to maintain our level of disaster readiness.

At the beginning of this piece, I mentioned the preoccupation with terms like "interoperability" and you may have supplied your

own definition of its meaning.

It means the ability to communicate with those with whom you need to communicate, when you need to do so. And, almost all of our issues since 9/11 have centered around effective communication (in much the same way as our pre 9/11 issues did). Certainly, we need personal protective equipment, antidotes for certain agents, and safety and other gear as well as better training and strategic plans. But, the center of all things in terms of adding an enhanced terrorism response capability is the assurance that responders and EOC personnel can communicate with each other. This takes more than a few trinkets, and more than a few dollars, to enable the various services in our nation to mount an effective response. What exists in Seattle/King County, we are finding in the ACS and RACES programs that are functioning under our sponsorship, is that few if any in the country have the capability that ACS/RACES possess. Few, if any, practice more diligently. And, those that are in step with us have most likely been inspired by your example.

We need to maintain our support for your efforts. I'd like to be able to commit to increasing that support, but I can commit to trying to do so. Thanks to the members and their families for your efforts this year. And, as always, stay ready.

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## Notes from the Meeting of 11/8/03

Approximately 25 members attended the ACS meeting which was held at the Training Room of the Seattle Public Utilities Operations Control Center. The meeting was devoted to debriefing the October 4th drill.

Mark Sheppard, N7LYE, suggested that messages be made more efficient through shortening them and streamlining the message form. Approximately fifteen messages were handled during the drill. Additional messages could be handled with adjustments to operating procedures.

Although the net structure generally worked, there was some confusion in moving to uhf frequencies. The use of tactical call signs should be encouraged. Access to the ACS repeaters was difficult from some of the posts. Phinney Ridge community center could hear all traffic and may serve as an alternative net control location.

Staff at some of the community centers were not aware of the drill and had no information about ACS. It's important that ACS members have signs and special apparel such as vests to identify them and their function at community centers. Informational brochures for SDART and ACS should be available at the community centers.

The Comm-center at the EOC needs further reconfiguration. Operating positions are congested and equipment needs upgrading. High frequency capability is marginal at present.

Training is always a necessity. Specific suggestions included quarterly drills at field posts, once a month member check-ins to net from field posts, once a month after net move to simplex and/or uhf repeaters for check-in.

In subsequent discussion, members agreed that the current message form should be revised and that a combination of voice and data modes may be optimal for increased message traffic. Visual aids such as maps will be helpful for EOC net control for keeping track of check-ins and locations of field operators. Maps should also be available at the community centers. Additional modifications of EOC equipment and operating stations were suggested. Finally, it was noted that field operators must check with net control if they cannot operate simplex.

Following a short break, Mark Sheppard continued with his ideas for action plans. They included revision of the standard message form and training on its use, the design of a net management procedure and practice to increase the efficiency of handling tactical emergency messages over our voice channels, conducting training and practice for field operators and EOC teams, implementation radio based text messaging to expedite message handling, implementation of PC based message taking at EOC for voice traffic, fixing wiring and reconfiguring operating positions at the EOC Comm-center, purchase of a new high frequency trans-

ceiver, improvement of EOC antennas, field testing of radio system access at all posts, evaluation of all EOC equipment with reprogramming and repair where indicated, increasing training and exercises, incorporation of more training and drills into regular net sessions, provision of vests and signs, work with SDART in validating our mutual objectives, agreeing on common message forms, protocols and procedures, designing training and drills to enhance working relations, updating information materials, and developing, implementing, and maintaining resource information on secure members-only web pages.

After Mark's presentation, members suggested that the membership roster be available on the web, that members identify community centers with which they are affiliated at the weekly net check-in, that message handling be practiced on the weekly nets including moving to differing modes including 440, crossband, and simplex after net. A vote was taken and green was the most popular color choice for ACS vests.

It was also noted that members should be prepared to be self-sufficient for 48 hours and that ACS operators learn how to interview people in order that all relevant information be gathered. The message form provides an excellent guide for questions. Matt Thomas, KD7PPK, volunteered to be SDART liaison.

A small version of the mes-

**Drill**, from page 1

plus headphones, a foot switch and, if needed, logging computers. For the drill we used only one radio. Paper forms were used for checking-in and copying messages. Headphones and foot switches make operations easy and efficient. Team partners can either watch from behind the operator or they can relax in an adjacent area until they relieve their team mate.

For this drill, the community center operators were called on the Puget Sound Repeater Group (PSRG) repeater, checked-in, then moved to either the North or South simplex frequency. Stations were asked to monitor a 70cm frequency to receive test messages that were to be relayed to the EOC.

In the drill, the EOC was staffed by 8 amateur volunteer operators and 3 EOC personnel. Five ACS members, (David Gorsich, KB7ZQS; Curt Black, WR5J; George Boswell, K7YHB; Dan Miklovic, KC7UTH; and Randy Schaffer, N7OYN) were split into three teams and assigned as net control operators for each of the 2 meter frequencies; PSRG, North simplex and South simplex. The simplex frequencies had a pair of operators who rotated. Ned Worcester, KB7NFO, was working state HF, Libe Napat, KB7WCW, was monitoring 6 meters, and along with Bill Dockstader, W7LSK, coordinating efforts of the 2 meter net control operators. Mark Sheppard, N7LYE, was busy sending messages to the community centers on the

70 centimeter backchannel. Steve Marten (EOC operations manager) and Erika Lund (EOC Staff-duty Officer) were monitoring the team, taking photographs, assisting with questions, and along with their other EOC duties, catering to our needs with donuts and coffee!

My role was first as part of a two person operator team on the North simplex frequency as net control, later as net control on the PSRG repeater. After community center and stations-at-large had checked in on the repeater, they moved to their simplex frequencies and began transmitting test messages back to the EOC. Simplex net control operators copied these messages and transferred them to their runner (Libe). Creative responses were crafted to the test messages, and then transmitted back to the reporting station. Any station that could not move to their simplex frequency was asked to monitor and use the PSRG repeater for any traffic they needed to transfer. The repeater was left mostly clear to monitor other community EOC's, visitors, as well as, any other agencies.

Many community centers were staffed by at least one operator, with some having more than one. Check-in on the PSRG repeater and later message traffic was transferred smoothly back to the EOC on simplex or repeater frequencies. The control operator teams on the three primary 2 meter frequencies worked smoothly. Transfers were done easily and with little confusion. A bit more

space at the EOC would make this process even easier, but this is a minor point. With 3 active operators and 2 backups it was possible to rotate the positions for learning and relief.

From the standpoint of a net control operator, the one thing that would have improved the drill would have been to stress the use of tactical call signs exclusively when calling the EOC. This enables finding the community center sheets and adding information to them with minimal requests for location. Initial check-in was done by polling the community centers from an alphabetical list by one net control operator. The relief net control operator was not familiar with the call signs of the operators but could easily find the community center sheets when tactical calls were used for contact with the EOC.

I have sent Mark some suggested changes to the logging forms used by the net control operators that would facilitate some tasks. On the community center lists (which include the calls and names of the assigned operators), I have asked to add a note indicating the preferred simplex site (either N or S) for each center, as well as space for notes and badge numbers. A check box for contact by repeater and simplex frequencies would also be helpful.

From my viewpoint, this was a very smooth drill. The coordination of the community center message traffic via simplex sites and the ability to have a clear

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**Drill**, from page 5

repeater frequency for most of the drill duration enhances ACS's mission in the event of a real emergency. The high turnout at the community centers and EOC made this a good drill, with many people exposed to moving messages around the city. It was a good feeling at the conclusion of the drill, knowing that we moved one step closer to the goal of serving the community with outstanding professionalism from the Auxiliary Communication Service.

Thanks to Bill, Mark, Libe, Dan (my net control teammate), Steve and Erika for making my time at the EOC during

this exercise fun, rewarding, and educational. Thanks, too, to all my fellow operators at the EOC and the field sites for making this a great ————

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**Editor**, from page 2

view mirrors, reflection was helpful in getting the most from our simulation drill. I believe that informal "debriefing" will improve our every-day ACS activities, too. Take a moment or two after Monday night net, or after reading QRV, or after meetings to reflect on how these might be improved. Let us know if you have suggestions. ————

**Meeting**, from page 4

sage form will be prepared and posted to the web as a .pdf document. Copies will be laminated and made available for members to carry in wallets. A need for a "health and welfare" message form was mentioned as was a need to develop protocols for emergency nets.

A team was established to look at weekly and emergency net protocols. The team includes: Bill Ehler K7NZV, Dave Gorsich KB7ZQS, George Boswell K7YHB, and John Kisela KD7RNW.

The next meeting was tentatively set for February 7, 2004. ————

**QRV?** - Seattle ACS

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